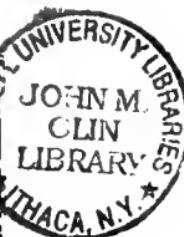


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THE EMANCIPATION

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THE EMANCIPATION
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS. BY
LEONARD INKSTER.

LONDON: SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.
3 ADAM STREET, ADELPHI. MCMXIII



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NOTE BY THE AUTHOR

THIS play was produced for two performances by Mr. Iden Payne during his autumn visit of 1912 to the Sheffield Playgoers Society, and for one performance in the Huddersfield Theatre. The cast will be found overleaf.

In making the following remarks I am not necessarily speaking of method, nor of my intentions when planning the play. But it has struck me that the charge of the central character being exceptional, and of the play as a result being "subtle" and not having wide application, may be answered thus. In painting the struggle between awakening youth and older individuals who unrealisingly chain him with chains, moral, physical, and emotional, if you take normal healthy unthinking youth, you do limit the depth to which you can dig in examining the essence of revolt. It happens, ironically enough, in life, that the nature which feels the need of revolt is precisely the nature least fitted for revolt.

Your coarse-fibred, conventional individual could fight easily enough, but being so little an individual he does not have to ; the groove, no groove to him, is his nature's natural home ; it is the highly strung animal which feels the bit and is unable easily to rid himself of it. If one takes this highly strung animal and examines his case, one is indeed guilty of painting an exception ; but by that very means one can examine more deeply the psychology of the growth and struggle which itself is universal. If one takes the coarser-grained animal and treats him at all realistically, one can only paint comic scenes of more or less broad encounters, in which there is really little struggle, though of course there may be very fine art. Had I been quite consistent I should have made my young man an artist, but in cowardice I stopped short of quite this exceptionality and merely gave him the artistic sensitiveness of character. I should like to add that there is the additional irony here, that the struggles these young men have to go through, which are to decide their future lives, occur *ex hypothesi* at a period of their lives when they have not yet come to their full strength. A young friend of mine, whom I have come to know since writing the play, is in just that

position. Because he wishes to be an artist he has to fight his family; because youth is the turning point of life he has to fight *now*. Yet it is just the nervous, perceptive nature of the artist which makes struggle of this sort painful to him; and in a few years, when it would be too late, he would be better fitted for the task.

L. I.

CAST OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE PLAY

MRS. ARROWSMITH	.	.	.	.	<i>Minnie Webb.</i>
MRS. PETERSON	.	.	.	.	<i>Josephine Lee.</i>
LAURA	.	.	.	.	<i>Sylvia Dawson.</i>
MR. ARROWSMITH	.	.	.	.	<i>Claude Haviland.</i>
JACK	.	.	.	.	<i>B. Iden Payne.</i>
EDGAR FYLDE	.	.	.	.	<i>Esmé Percy.</i>
JANET	.	.	.	.	<i>Isabel Turner.</i>

CHARACTERS

MR. ARROWSMITH.

MRS. ARROWSMITH.

JACK *Their son.*

EDGAR FYLDE *His friend.*

LAURA *Mrs. Arrowsmith's maid.*

MRS. PETERSON *Mrs. Arrowsmith's friend.*

ACT I. *The garden.*

ACT II.—SCENE I. . . . *Jack's sitting-room.*

ACT II.—SCENE II. . . . *The morning-room.*

ACT III. *The garden.*

The action takes place in and about the house of the Arrowsmiths, on the outskirts of a provincial town.

THE EMANCIPATION
1908-1912

THE EMANCIPATION

ACT I

The garden. House on left. Deck chairs and others about, also a table. Paths lead past a hedge to other parts of the garden in rear. Present, seated in front of stage on lawn, MRS. ARROWSMITH and MRS. PETERSON.

TIME—*Saturday afternoon. The sun is over the hedge.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*sucking her thread and then sewing*]. I hope you won't mind having tea so late. It's because of the men. Yes, we were so proud when Jack decided to go into the business. But that was a year ago. Fancy it being so long since you were here last.

MRS. PETERSON. Oh, Winnie, do you remember Alfred Collins? I think you only saw him once, at my wedding.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. No, I can't recall him. Do you know this stitch?

MRS. PETERSON [*looking*]. How pretty! You must teach me it some time. Well, he's been in Canada, and of course he saw my boy—Mr. Collins, I mean. He writes to say he doesn't think Percy will stay there long.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Doesn't farming suit him?

MRS. PETERSON [*calmly*]. I really don't know what Percy will ever do. His father is losing patience. After Percy failed for the army it was as much as I could do to induce his father to try him in the office. Then he wanted an open-air life and talked of gold mining, and at last Rex packed him off to this farm. He doesn't write regularly, but I believe he wants to marry. His father won't do anything more for him, I'm afraid.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. And how are Wenty and Arthur?

MRS. PETERSON. Arthur's too young to give any trouble yet, except that he came home a fortnight to-day with a collar-bone broken, because he will insist on riding the motor-bicycle and he doesn't know how to. He's better now. Wenty's in the office at present, but he does very little work, and he's very fond of a barmaid down Gigglesworth way. [*Says placidly*.] Do you think I might pick one of those roses? They are so pretty.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Yes, do. [*They rise.*]

MRS. PETERSON. Only one, to pin in my dress. You're lucky with Jack. And he's so clever, isn't he?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh . . . no. But he's a steady lad. We've never had any trouble with him. [*Sit again.*]

MRS. PETERSON [*frankly*]. With barmaids, you mean.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*hurriedly*]. He reads a good deal, and I think he finds life a little dull at home.

MRS. PETERSON. Is he still so quiet and shy?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Yes; he doesn't grow up very quickly. I did think going to Cambridge would wake him up and make him more like other boys. And each time when he came back he did seem a little brighter, but it didn't last long. I wish he would come out of his shell a bit more. And I wish he were a little fatter and stronger. [*She looks a little troubled.*] I've been giving him cod-liver oil and maltine. Perhaps this London friend he's bringing this afternoon will rouse him a little. A much older man, a Mr. Fylde, a clever author. Yes, Laura? [*This in a quietly surprised voice to Laura, who has come on to the lawn with a black folding-table and cloth.*]

LAURA. Will you have tea here, ma'am?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. But it isn't your work.

LAURA. It's Janet's afternoon out, ma'am, and Fanny's sprained her wrist.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh dear. How did she do it? Is it serious?

LAURA. I think it hurts rather, ma'am, but Cook seems to know what to do.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Then you'll have to help Janet with the waiting to-night, Laura. Yes, bring the tea-things here. Your master will be in for tea, and Mr. Jack and a friend.

LAURA. Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit.*]

MRS. PETERSON. That's a very pretty girl, Winnie. I didn't know you kept three as well as Cook.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*still troubled over domestic matters, half absent-mindedly.*]. Yes. Harry said there really wasn't any reason why I shouldn't have a lady's maid, and after all he could afford it now, and so I made the place for her.

MRS. PETERSON. Made the place?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh, of course, I didn't tell you. Poor girl, she was in great trouble. A friend wrote to me about her. Her mother had just died —some sort of a music-hall performer, I believe, in London; and of course the child wasn't properly trained for anything.

MRS. PETERSON. But—her father.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I'm afraid, Emily, she never had one. Of course it seemed at first preposterous; Harry laughed at the idea, but I saw her, and she seemed such a nice, affectionate girl, and really quite lady-like. I don't see any harm in befriending her; do you? Nor does Harry, really.

[Enter LAURA, with tea-things.

Yes, my husband is exceptionally successful with his roses. The teaspoons *in* the saucers, Laura. That's right. Yes, and leave the spirit-kettle on the table, and the bell at my side. And now, will you tell the gentlemen, if they're in, that we're having tea in the garden. I always say, Emily, that Harry's quite as good a gardener as Dobson.

LAURA. Yes, ma'am, the master's in the smoking-room, and the gentlemen have gone to the lavatory to wash their hands after their walk.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*hurriedly*]. Quite so, quite so. Well, will you sound the gong and then let them know where we are. And Laura, gather a few strawberries. I told Cook we should want some. Why didn't she see about it?

LAURA. Yes, ma'am.

[Exit.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Now, Emily, won't you put your sewing on this chair?

[*The ladies lay down their work, and Mrs. ARROWSMITH busies herself with the spirit-lamp and tea-things. A gong sounds.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I wonder why Jack didn't bring Mr. Fylde straight out to us here. He has very little idea of the conveniences.

MRS. PETERSON. Oh, but boys so seldom have. He'll get the polish soon enough, Winnie. I'm sure Wenty—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Emily, Harry's a good man, but I think I'm more anxious for Jack to be a perfect gentleman than for anything else in the world. Ah, here you are, dear.

[*She rises, smiling, to kiss MR. ARROWSMITH, a man rather shorter than she, fattish, coarse, but powerful, and a man who has risen.*

You knew Emily—Mrs. Peterson—was coming this afternoon.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Good afternoon, Mrs. Peterson. [Bows.] Very pleased to see you. Have you seen my roses yet? [To his wife who is now pouring out tea.] Have you been round the garden yet?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Now, dear, Emily's only been

here a couple of hours, surely you'll give us time to have a little chat first.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Well, couldn't you chat while—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Here's Jack at last.

[JACK comes from the house with EDGAR FYLDE, the latter looking ten years older than JACK, tall, tolerant, kind. JACK is nervous, young, formless, just now excited.

JACK. Hullo, people. Here's Edgar. Oh, good afternoon, Mrs. Peterson. [Shakes hands and sits.]

MRS. ARROWSMITH (shaking hands with FYLDE). Jack, I don't think Mr. Fylde knows either Mrs. Peterson or your father.

JACK. Oh, I apologise humbly. [Rises and repeats the formula.] Mr. Edgar Fylde—Mrs. Peterson,—my father—Mr. Edgar Fylde. [Sits. Mutual salutations.]

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Mr. Fylde, Jack has made you a little late. We don't stand on ceremony here, and I hope you'll forgive us having started tea without you. [The business of tea may be supplied ad lib.]

FYLDE. Oh please . . . I like a picnic. [Takes a cup.]

MR. ARROWSMITH. You'll find us plain people, Mr. Fylde. I expect Jack has told you that. But you must take us as you find us, and I hope you'll stay as long as you can.

FYLDE. Thank you very much, but I *must* go back to-morrow evening.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Well, of course, if your business—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. My dear, Mr. Fylde's an author.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Well, isn't that a business?

FYLDE [*negligently leaning back in his chair and balancing his cup on his knee to MRS. ARROWSMITH's anxiety*]. Quite right, Mr. Arrowsmith; only most of us aren't honest enough to admit it.

JACK [*scornfully*]. My dear Edgar, is it worth while to be subtle?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*quietly*]. Jack!

JACK. Well—what—I didn't—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Are you quite sure that was quite polite to Mr. Fylde?

JACK. To—? O Lord! Give me some more tea, please, mother dear.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*to MRS. PETERSON*]. Is your cup ready? Jack, why don't you look after Mrs. Peterson?

[JACK rises to do so, joggles EDGAR's knee. EDGAR's cup falls and is broken. MR. ARROWSMITH rises and looks over the table.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. O Jack! My best china!

MR. ARROWSMITH. Clumsy fellow. You've spoilt Mr. Fylde's trousers.

FYLDE. Oh, it doesn't matter at all. [Wipes his knee with his handkerchief.] My own fault for putting it in such a silly place. I really beg your pardon. [Throws the bits carelessly into the slop basin. MRS. ARROWSMITH winces as each piece goes in.]

[Enter LAURA, through the bushes, looking charming. Her fingers are all red. She carries a basket of strawberries.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [pleasantly]. Not that way, Laura. When you wait you must come round from the house. And will you put the strawberries properly in a dish and get a fresh cup and saucer.

LAURA. Yes, ma'am.

[She goes off demurely.

FYLDE [conversationally]. Is that the charming maid Laura Jack was speaking of to me?

MR. ARROWSMITH [waking up]. Eh? [Looks at Jack.]

JACK [*hurriedly and nervous*]. I summed up our establishment as Cook—buxom, Fanny—pretty, Janet—passable, Laura—charming, the boot-boy—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Really, Jack, you do talk a lot of nonsense. And I don't think Mr. Fylde can be interested in—

MRS. PETERSON. You remind me to-day quite of Wenty, Jack.

JACK [*relieved*]. Oh, how is Wenty?

MRS. PETERSON [*is murmuring*]. Very well, thank you,

[*when LAURA comes back with cup and saucer. MRS. ARROWSMITH fills cup and saucer, passes to FYLDE during the following speech of MR. ARROWSMITH, who has broken in.*

MR. ARROWSMITH. You come from London, Mr. Fylde, the finest city in the world. Yet I don't suppose London can show anything to beat this. And when you're as old as I am, I dare say you'll be willing to exchange London, with its Bohemian life, its clubs, its flats, its music-halls, its cleverness, for a garden like this, and a quiet Saturday afternoon among the roses. Look at that cloud up there. As Hamlet said—

[FYLDE and MRS. PETERSON are looking at the cloud.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. My dear, Mr. Fylde will think you quite poetical.

JACK [*hardly daring to say it*]. It was Polonius, though, wasn't it?

FYLDE. Jack, did I tell you the Aldwych Play Society are producing Tchekoff's *Cherry Orchard* in the autumn?

MRS. PETERSON. Is that a play? We have such poor theatres down in these parts, of course. We only had one really nice piece the whole of last winter—*The Arcadians*.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I thought that so *pretty*, Mr. Fylde. Have you seen it?

FYLDE. Oh yes. Several times.

MR. ARROWSMITH. There seem to be a great number of places of entertainment in London nowadays. Picture theatres are springing up everywhere. Is this Tchekoff a clever writer?

FYLDE. He was. The poor fellow's dead.

JACK [*now earnest and a little spluttering*]. Oh, but it isn't like that. It isn't like musical comedies and all that drivel. Tchekoff was a dramatist. He comes in with people like Ibsen and—and Shaw. There's a great revival. The

theatre's got to be like—like the National Gallery and—

MRS. PETERSON. Shaw? Did you say Shaw? Isn't that the man who—

MR. ARROWSMITH [*shortly*]. Socialist.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Jack, will you run and see whatever Laura's doing with the strawberries?

JACK. Yes, mother. [*Puts his cup on the floor.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Not there. Someone might tread on it.

[JACK with a half-suppressed "Oh!"
lifts the cup.

FYLDE. Allow me. [*He puts it on the table.*]

[JACK goes out. MR. ARROWSMITH rises
and cuts off some dead flowers.

MRS. PETERSON } } [together]. { Jack seems to-day—
MRS. ARROWSMITH } } { Oh, Mr. Fylde—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I beg your pardon, my dear.
Another cup?

MRS. PETERSON [*putting down cup*]. No, thank you, I've quite finished.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. But you must have some strawberries now I've sent for them. Whatever has that girl been doing? [*Sees MR. ARROWSMITH.*] Harry, dear, I've not finished tea at any rate, and I don't think Mr. Fylde—

FYLDE. Quite, thanks. [*Leans back in his chair.*]

MR. ARROWSMITH. Oh, I beg your pardon. [*Comes and sits down dutifully.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*to FYLDE*]. Just one more cup—won't you smoke then?—Harry, a cigarette.

FYLDE. Thanks, I have one. [*Lights up.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*to FYLDE*]. I was going to say I'm particularly glad you've been able to come down. Jack talks so little to us, and I wanted—

MR. ARROWSMITH. My dear Winnie, there's nothing whatever the matter with the boy. What are you always worrying yourself for?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Now, Harry, it's perfectly obvious a young man in a provincial town, with old people like us—you see, Mr. Fylde, he has no friends here and he's never wanted any of his college friends to come—and I'm sure when he was with you in London—I wanted to get him to join the tennis club, but—

[*She breaks off as JACK and LAURA enter together.*]

FYLDE [*not seeing*]. Well, Mrs. Arrowsmith, just as a young girl—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Another time. Laura, those strawberries are no use now. What have you been *doing* all this time?

LAURA. Please, ma'am——

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Well, fetch the tray now and clear away, please. Oh . . . Mr. Jack.

JACK. Oh, I've finished. [Gulps his tea and takes a strawberry from LAURA.]

FYLDE. Oh, by the way, I beg your pardon.

[Hands his cigarette case to the ladies.

MRS. PETERSON. No thank you.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [a little nervous]. No thank you, Mr. Fylde.

[JACK smiles sardonically.

FYLDE. You, Jack?

JACK. Thanks.

[LAURA takes some of the things out.

MR. ARROWSMITH [growling]. I can't think why you all encourage him in that soft habit.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Now, Harry, Jack's over twenty-one. [Confidentially to FYLDE]. I never smoke before the servants.

FYLDE [delightedly]. Otherwise . . . you do?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I'm afraid Emily thinks it very shocking of me.

MRS. PETERSON [disapproving]. Of course not.

JACK [suddenly]. O Lord! O Lord! O Lord! Edgar, the idea of women smoking has just reached us.

[*Re-enter LAURA. MRS. ARROWSMITH skilfully drops her cigarette and puts her foot on it.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*to FYLDE*]. Would you care to see over the garden? We've a little time before we need dress.

FYLDE. Thanks. You're a rose expert, I believe.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Well——

[*Exeunt talking. Exit also LAURA with the last of the tea-things, MRS. ARROWSMITH calling after her.*

You'll take the chairs and table in, please, Laura.

LAURA. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. PETERSON. May I go to my room, Winnie? I've several things to do before dinner.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh yes, dear.

[*They prepare to go out.*

JACK. Mother, do you mind if I put on my dinner jacket?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*rather cross*]. Of course you can if you want.

JACK. The other's so uncomfortable.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I'm sure it isn't.

JACK. Oh well, I suppose I shall have to wear it.

[*By the time MRS. PETERSON has drifted out of hearing.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Jack, why were you so cross and boorish at tea?

JACK. Cross? Cross? I wasn't cross. You shut me up the only time I began to talk about anything interesting and—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I'm sure I didn't shut you up.

[She goes out. JACK sits down and buries his face in his hands.]

Enter LAURA.

LAURA *[comes to him and puts her hand on his head]*. Poor Jack! Can I help? Can I help the little boy who's so frightened?

JACK *[putting his hand up to hers]*. Laura, if I had the courage I'd jump right into the middle of my mother's tea-table instead of just smashing a cup off old Edgar's knee.

LAURA. Why didn't you?

JACK. It's easy to preach. You weren't stifled from the beginning. You didn't live in an atmosphere of dulness, artificiality, conventionality, unreality, idiocy, stupidity, ignorance, dulness—

LAURA. I don't like you when you talk like that. You love your mother.

JACK. And therefore am I to be frightened of criticising her, even of thinking apart from her?

LAURA. No, you've got to be honest, before it's

too late. Every day's making it harder for you.
You've got to speak. [There is a pause.]

JACK. I can't.

LAURA. There's someone coming. I must take the table in. I don't know how to advise you—I wish I could help more.

JACK. When we're just alone together I don't need any help.

[She goes into the house as FYLDE comes through the bushes.]

FYLDE. A wasp stung your father. He's gone in for a blue-bag.

JACK. Ha! [chuckles]. What do you think of us?

FYLDE. I am gratified by my—

JACK. Don't be polite.

FYLDE. I'm not. Your mother's a charming woman, transparently genuine, and the old man's—er—

JACK. Er?

FYLDE. Well, delightful, and quite clever.

JACK. Clever?

FYLDE. What he doesn't know about knives isn't worth knowing.

JACK. Oh . . . knives.

FYLDE. And you should hear him knock holes out of the free traders.

JACK [*curtly*]. He never talks to me about such things.

FYLDE [*waving his hand slowly*]. And all this—this sort of thing is very soothing to a tired man.

JACK [*furiously*]. Yes. But I'm not tired. I'm only young and nearly mad. You don't have to live in it. It isn't your life. Can you see it at all so as to understand me?

FYLDE. It's very comfortable. Yes, yes, I know ; it's a bit like a feather bed.

JACK. Look at the conversation ! They were shocked when I mentioned Shaw. They'd be bored if I talked about Carlyle. They're shocked or bored at every living thing except garden parties and weather and light scandal and the state of their livers.

FYLDE. Well, you can't expect profundity at the tea-table, and after some tea-tables you can't think how restful it is to sit at one where they don't try to be too brilliant in the hot weather.

JACK. What do you mean by the tea-table ? They're like that *always*. Breakfast, office ; lunch, office ; tea, office ; dinner, soft music, dozing, a glass of milk, bed. That's my normal day.

FYLDE. Ah, now you're mixing the arguments.

Your own life's your own affair. What have they to do with it? They don't affect it.

JACK. What!

FYLDE [*bantering*]. You remember Henley's "I am the Captain of my Soul." Go your own way. Think your own thoughts. Be a man.

JACK. But that's just the horror. I'm not the captain of my soul. Henley didn't have to live—from his youth up, mind, that's the point—in an atmosphere of cotton-wool and blankets—of dulness, artificiality, ignorance, stupidity, idiocy, unreality, conventionality, dul—. You say it needn't affect me, but it does. I've grown up in it, and I can't shake it off.

FYLDE. Have you ever tried?

JACK. I'm always trying. But I can't offend my parents.

FYLDE. They don't come into it.

JACK. Yes they do. You don't see that I'm not free. The only way I can begin is by being honest in some little thing, opposing them, in a trifle, trying to shake off their influence by degrees. When I began to grow up I began to have tastes and opinions in little things, and of course I was shy. They laughed at me. It made me shyer. We had little rows, and I shut up. And now we're

strangers in little things and big ones too, yet I have to keep up the farce of intimacy. For that's the worst of it; I do try now, but its torturing because I feel as if I were almost physically a part of them, and to oppose them would be like opposing another part of myself.

FYLDE. That's unhealthy, at your age.

JACK. And then, Edgar, how do I *know* I'm right? I haven't the confidence to carry me through any battle. Once they certainly knew better than me, and, argue as I like with myself, when I'm actually with them in flesh and blood, I'm still their child. At what precise moment could I say, "You did right to direct me one second ago, but *now* I'm a man and have judgment"? And of course, you see, I always see their point of view so horribly clearly, just because I *am* flesh and blood with them. That makes it still more difficult. And it's not only them who make me feel like this: it's all the other people who've seen me as a child, the place I've known as a child, everything. I can never be confident or happy in this town where I've grown up.

FYLDE. Really, most young men don't think about such things. They just grow up unconsciously, and naturally strike out. You seem to

have gone in the other direction. It's getting late now. Let's talk it over to-night with a whisky.

JACK. *Whisky!* They think nobody ought to touch spirits till he's thirty-five.

FYLDE. Tell the maid to bring some syphons and tumblers up to your room after the others have gone to bed. Or, perhaps, you haven't a room.

JACK. I have. After no end of trouble—my mother couldn't see why I wanted a room—I got a little place upstairs for my books. There are two doors in it and no lock, and if ever I sit in it after dinner instead of in the drawing-room they think I'm either ill or cross. They don't say anything.

FYLDE. Heavens! Well, make the first move towards your emancipation to-night by having a jolly good drink.

JACK. Edgar, you've come in from outside. You don't understand. To me it's deadly earnest. These people with their—

FYLDE. Dulness, &c.

JACK. Yes, all that—fill the atmosphere. I can't move without considering how the action looks to them, without unconsciously referring it to them. Sometimes I want to walk on tiptoe and shrivel up; that's when I'm afraid, I'm paralysed. Sometimes I'm compelled to say rude, silly things, that's when

I'm fighting. Starting with the fear of opposition and ridicule from these people, with their strange mesmeric physical influence over me, I've developed into this absolutely nerveless state.

[LAURA comes in and stands listening.]

I'm like a child or a dog with a man's consciousness. I've tried to run away from them as it were and live by myself, but even when I was alone I felt them near, and their opinions, ways, feelings, thoughts, overpowered me just because I could understand them so clearly. They seem to me to hate reality, and so I daren't be real. I've had a horror of being real for a year. I daren't breathe or feel. [Piteously] Edgar, can't you do something to help me?

FYLDE. Has nothing serious never happened to you?

[LAURA leans forward.]

JACK [in despair, almost shuddering]. There's something—it doesn't help—it makes it worse—it's awful.

FYLDE. I think you're ill.

LAURA [coming slowly forward]. No, he's too sensitive. Why doesn't he do something instead of for ever thinking, thinking?

FYLDE [politely]. Why not, indeed?

JACK. I didn't tell you somehow—Edgar, Laura and I are engaged.

FYLDE [*looks at LAURA, then smiles*]. Oh no. She's too good for you.

JACK. I know. She's not frightened of anything.

LAURA [*excusing him to FYLDE*]. My mother and I were friends. She never used authority.

FYLDE. She was justified in the result.

LAURA. Yet I'm afraid of what the mistress'll say if she finds me talking to you, and these chairs not taken in. [*She begins to fold up the deck chairs.*

JACK. There you see, she can laugh.

FYLDE. Of course.

JACK. But I can't.

FYLDE. No, because you're morbid and fantastic, and full of an unholy egoism. Get married, you sluggard.

LAURA [*catching his tone*]. You imagine things and let them make nasty decaying holes in your brain. I know. I've done it myself.

FYLDE. You're a freak. All's right with the world. Kiss her.

JACK [*revoltedly*]. Idiots. Edgar, you think it's all a bit of nonsense to be laughed away. Should I have asked you to come and help me for *that*? You think I am an exception, and, by God, I am !

I've brains. It doesn't matter for the others, but this time the middle-class family system's made a mistake. I know how it's worked. They send us to school, and they put us into the office, and they do all they know to make us exactly like themselves. They tell us what clothes to wear, what thoughts to think, what books to read, what to feel, what to believe, what to hope, what to eat. They tell us how to do our hair, what God to have, what friends to make. And when they have done everything they can to destroy every spark of individuality and courage, to bind us entirely to themselves, they choose the girls we're to marry if they can manage to without our seeing. After which they allow us to live in a house of their approval, and die after the manner of their grandfathers. And because ninety-nine per cent. of us haven't the wit and the spirit to want to be free, they say we're happy. But they made the mistake of sending me to college. Damn it, I say, we're not happy. We're contented, stagnant. And I tell you I won't be contented. I won't be a part of their iniquitous family machine. I'll get free if I—if I—

[Enter MRS. ARROWSMITH in evening dress. JACK's jaw drops, and his blood freezes.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*quietly*]. Jack ! *What a noise you're making !* Laura, why aren't the chairs taken in yet ?

[LAURA *smiles at FYLDE and takes away the chairs.*

I'm surprised at you, Jack. Didn't you hear the dressing bell ? Mr. Fylde will be late for dinner.

JACK [*almost inaudibly*]. I'm sorry, Mother.

[*He slouches into the house.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Well, to leave you out here !

FYLDE. I'm in, shall I say, better company ?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Mr. Fylde, I'm too old to flirt with. Shall we go in ?

[*He takes her arm.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*halts and says very earnestly*]. So you've been talking to Jack. Can you tell me at all why he is—unhappy with us here at home ? I can see he is unhappy.

FYLDE [*with real sympathy and reverence*]. May I speak quite frankly ?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Yes.

FYLDE. I shouldn't worry too much about your son. His case is serious, but, I think, mainly his own affair. You know that the present age is a very restless age, and that many and many a girl gets married almost wholly to get away from home.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. In books.

FYLDE. No. It's true. Your son is in this state.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*with sudden horror*]. He isn't in love? You don't mean he's going to get married?

FYLDE [*smiling*]. No. I honestly think you're quite safe there. But what I mean is, he *is* an individual. Have you ever realised that?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*thinking hard and quite humble*]. My husband and I never stood in the way of our child. Do you mean it would be good for him to go away a bit?

FYLDE. I mean that you should try not to think at all what is good for him. Try and treat him not as a mother but as a friend. Have you ever on any occasion asked him for his advice about anything?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I don't think so.

FYLDE. That would be a great help. He is rather an exceptional boy. Extraordinarily intense and also extraordinarily sensitive and introspective, and still very young. When people matter to him very much, as you do, Mrs. Arrowsmith, they really do live in his brain, and if they are not in sympathy with him, or if they patronise him, it is torture to him. You must, if you will permit the metaphor, help him to wean himself of you.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I'm afraid I don't quite understand.

FYLDE [*smiling*]. Ah, well, I shall be late for dinner. [*Looks at his watch.*] Do you mind—er?

[*He indicates the house, and the two go in.*

CURTAIN

A C T II

SCENE I

SCENE:—*A small sitting-room. There is a door out of the room at the side of the stage and also at the back, near the other side. There is a bust of Shakespeare on the book-case against the right wall. A rather untidy room, as untidy as JACK dare let it be. He and FYLDE are in arm-chairs, smoking, in evening dress but lounge jackets. Before them is a table with a syphon and whisky. It is late.*

FYLDE. Do you really intend to marry this girl?
JACK [*irritated*]. I've told you. [*Frightened*]. Does it strike you as—impossible? You know cowards sometimes—just because their cowardice leads them to refuse to face facts and realise them—cowards do sometimes reach up blindly to feats which the open-eyed man would never dare think of. I'm speaking of moral cowardice, of course.

FYLDE. Yes, it does seem to me that a man who is frightened of his very respectable parents know-

ing he's drinking whisky, would normally rather shy at marrying an illegitimate servant.

JACK. I do shy. The whole idea makes me quiver. Yet I don't know. . . . One can face big things easier . . . because one can't see them. And once we're married, you see, I should be away. No. I can't conceive it. Fancy *telling* them! Fancy my mother's face, the movement of her body! I could see her thoughts before the first word came.

FYLDE [*pouring out whisky*]. Have some more of your emancipation.

JACK [*taking it*]. Laura got us this. There'll be the devil of a row if it's discovered. [*Drinks.*]

FYLDE. Your mother's positively the best of mothers. You don't see it.

JACK. So long as I'm part of her how can I see anything?

FYLDE. She's very anxious about you, and, like you, she's shy of her own flesh and blood. That shyness exists in most families. It's a pity. If you 'ld conquer your shyness and speak to her as a friend, you 'ld find—

JACK. But, Edgar, I used to. When I came back from college or from you, I used to begin that way. Then, as I told you—authority—my people would not only laugh at all the things that matter

to me. They would laugh, have laughed, with authority. Besides, as I told you, they hate reality, real words, real feelings expressed. It seems to make them uncomfortable somehow.

FYLDE. That's mainly shyness.

JACK. Each time when I came back from college it was a struggle in miniature of the big perpetual one. I made some little remark of my own. They didn't like it. I struggled to keep my point of view, to keep outside them. Then I sank into their own commonplace and the round of things, and became silent, even comfortable.

FYLDE. I don't know what your mother was like a few years ago. And it takes time, you know, for any mother to realise her child has grown up. And in your case, where the mother is a woman with a strong but rather sluggish personality and an almost german sense of the family, and the son is weak and enormously sensitive to atmosphere—

JACK [*in a fearful whisper*]. I was ranting this afternoon about dulness and all that, but, do you know, I sometimes see something almost cowlike in her.

FYLDE [*smiling*]. Tell her. Let it out. Get rid of the idea. Then it won't bother you any more, and you'll see how really you see her as an angel.

JACK. If I'd only got you to tell things to. Even to-night, just owing to your presence, I'm a different being. I'm myself. Any outsider gives me life. I'm already dreading your going. I shall sink back into them.

FYLDE. That'll go. You'll grow.

JACK. Of course, that's the main thing, that I shall sink back into *them*, my family; but, besides that, even if they were strangers, I should find living with them intolerable. One doesn't really care a fig that people aren't clever and up-to-date and don't have any understanding of ideas, though it's melancholy if you haven't anyone to talk to. But when people sacrifice life to order, the end to the means, then to live with them really is hopeless, whether they matter to you or not.

FYLDE. Your mother's a good housewife. One can see that. But you needn't think that only provincial people forget to live. After all, the only people who do live, who, as Bergson puts it, haven't anything of the machine in them, are poets and lovers. And they can't stand the strain long.

JACK. Laura's coming to talk to us soon—when she's finished with my mother.

FYLDE. Eh? Do you think that quite wise?

JACK. Is it *wise* to think I could marry her?

FYLDE. You've got a big job with this girl. Do you really mean to marry her? Yes, yes, you've said so. But why don't you travel for a bit?

JACK. She's always saying that. If I'd only got the pluck to go! But the guv'nor would ask questions and say, "Eh? What's that? The lad's been to a good school and the University, and now—" and the mater would smile. It would *jar*. If I could go through that little Hell—you know, Edgar, I'm not afraid of opposing people who don't matter to me—it's *not* ordinary cowardice—but if I could get away—to London—I'd stay.

FYLDE. What in the world for?

JACK. Well, you know, I paint a bit.

FYLDE. Stuff. You know you only think of that because you associate the idea with your freedom. Whereas you're interested in business for itself—God knows why. You've told me so.

JACK. It's true.

FYLDE. Don't think to find your salvation by running away. You've got to find it here. But that's no reason why you shouldn't travel for a bit first. You could come back a lot healthier and wake people up instead of sinking into sleep the same as them.

JACK. I should want money.

FYLDE. Ask for it.

JACK. I couldn't. The guv'nor would say--those things. Mother would--

FYLDE. *Let him, let them.*

JACK. And he wouldn't give in.

FYLDE. I'll finance you.

JACK. No. It would be rebellion. [*Drinks whisky, in despair.*] Damnation! Yet I feel--

FYLDE. I'm not going to leave things in the state they're in. Make an effort. Go away, and then if you still--well--er--still love her, come back and get her.

JACK. [*doubtfully, but with a playful spirit rising in him.*] Two rows instead of one!

FYLDE. Have you *no* sense of proportion? Now, just listen. I'm pretty well off and successful now and all that. But that's simply because I'm not genuinely a writer, only a talker, so far as words are concerned. What the Lord really meant me to be, and I knew it, was a musician. Like you, I feared my parents. I was a coward. I spoke to them once in fear and trembling and of course they laughed. And then I sneaked off to College and read for the Bar, and made a compromise and drifted into letters. Your case is parallel. It's true you don't know any more than I do what it is exactly

you want, but if you do really want this girl, when the row comes you'll collapse at the first rebuff you know must be given you. If you go away first—

[*He looks up as LAURA enters from the back, smiling and excited.*]

LAURA. Your mother told me to remind you before I went up to bed to put out the light; you left it on last night. [She sits down.]

JACK [*in a rage, shouting.*]. There. You see, Edgar. Everything I do or don't do is known and catalogued. I've had enough of it. [Drinks.]

FYLDE. Yes, I know. But it's more important just now to use a little imagination with regard to this young lady. [To LAURA] Wouldn't it—er—be prudent at least to *pretend* to go to bed? Shut a few doors and so on, whatever you think correct. The mistress is almost sure to expect to hear you go to bed.

LAURA [*jumping up*]. Oh yes. How stupid. Of course. [Goes out of the room.]

FYLDE. Which is your mother's bedroom?

JACK. Down the corridor; next yours, opposite mine. Why?

FYLDE. Nothing. But . . .

[LAURA returns silently and shuts the door.]

LAURA. Give me a cigarette, please. [*Takes one.*] Now, if I'm caught I'll get the sack. [*Settles comfortably back in real enjoyment.*]

JACK [*drinking*]. I almost wish we could be caught. After all, that *would* end it; it *would* bring us face to face with——

FYLDE [*pensively*]. All the same it's a pity these doors haven't locks.

JACK [*staring, then drinking*]. Why, what an old wet-blanket it is! Here's Edgar been preaching courage for half an hour, and when I say he's at last given it me——

FYLDE. You'll have a headache to-morrow.

JACK. Why, you think——? [*Puts down his glass.*]

FYLDE. I do.

LAURA [*almost crooning*]. Besides, though you've got to face a row sometime for me, after all there's a lot of difference between that and a girl caught late at night smoking with men. Why there'd be a scandal, wouldn't there?—a big one, I mean. How I should love it! But it wouldn't be fun for you, Jack.

JACK. Well, who's going to get caught? The bedrooms are too far away for anyone to hear us here. Don't spoil it.

FYLDE [*rising*]. In that case, good-night. I'm dead tired.

JACK. No, no, stop and talk. [*In fun*] Besides, think how much worse it would be if we were caught alone. Aren't you a chaperone, sort of?

FYLDE [*smiling*]. Well, well, I think we can risk it. [*Shakes hands with LAURA*]. Good-night, and the best of luck. Good-night, Jack.

LAURA. Good-night, Mr. Fylde.

[*He goes through door at back.*

Now I think that was very nice of him.

JACK. What?

LAURA. Going off. I like him.

JACK. Yes, but I rather wanted you to get to know him.

LAURA. I do. Jack.

JACK. Yes.

LAURA [*wistfully*]. Why don't you ever kiss me?

JACK. You know I'm not a romantic idiot.

LAURA. I sometimes wonder if you will ever marry me.

JACK [*uneasy*]. Laura, now don't be serious.

LAURA [*with some firmness*]. I often wonder why you asked me. I sometimes fear you'll put it off and put it off until—

JACK. Until what?

LAURA. Until you are satisfied by just imagining it.

JACK. No. Don't say that.

LAURA. But don't you sometimes feel that yourself?

JACK [*in a low voice*]. Yes, that's just it. I have so much of the artist in me. Laura I—I am afraid I may never wake up.

LAURA. Mr. Fylde wakes you up. Why aren't you always real? Sometimes I feel you haven't anything of your own at all.

JACK. Edgar's splendid. But he'll go.

LAURA. Why don't *I* wake you up? There's something queer in your sending for him when I'm here. Don't I help you? I don't understand it at all. I don't like it somehow.

JACK [*slowly*]. I think I need somebody or something *fresh* from outside.

LAURA. I came from outside.

JACK. Yes, but I got used to you before I—

LAURA. Before you fell in love with me.

JACK. Yes. And *that* I did gradually. [*Laughs*.]

LAURA. I sometimes wonder whether you did do it. I think he will be a very good friend to us. Do you see how naturally he takes our—our relations?

JACK. But one takes that for granted with him.

LAURA. Most men would call me scheming.

JACK. They shan't.

LAURA. Not when we're——

JACK. Married.

LAURA. I know it will be hard for you.

JACK. And for you.

LAURA. I don't mind.

JACK. No. You don't seem a bit frightened of anything that may happen to yourself.

LAURA. My mother brought me up not to be afraid even of her.

JACK. You're always saying that.

LAURA. And it always makes you thoughtful, doesn't it? Now, it's getting so late I really must go to bed.

JACK. Finish your cigarette. Be jolly. [*He gets up and puts his hands on her knees.*] Kid—pal, thinking's horrid.

LAURA. Just together. One more minute. I love the night time and winter.

JACK. We'll do this again. I love you.

LAURA [*laughing*]. Like it? I think we were born to play together.

JACK. It's a sort of defiance, even if nobody does know of it.

LAURA. Makes you feel brave?

JACK. And good.

LAURA. We always understand each other, don't we?

JACK. You said just now you didn't understand me at all.

LAURA [*troubled again*]. Did I?

JACK [*with assumed passion*]. Why are you a servant?

LAURA [*light-hearted*]. Well, my dear, for the very simple reason that in affairs of this world my mother was a fool.

JACK. Don't you mind?

LAURA. Why don't you stop it—to-morrow?

JACK. I—can't.

LAURA. Well, I have to be up early to do things—to-morrow.

JACK. Sh!

LAURA. What?

JACK. A noise.

LAURA. No.

[*He gets up and stands between her and the door. He turns to her, frightened.*

JACK. Laura, I really believe——

[*She is impassive. There is decidedly a noise. JACK goes to the light to turn it out.*

LAURA [*holding his arm, looks steadily at him*].
No.

[*He stands between her and the door.*
The door at the back opens, and
MRS. ARROWSMITH appears in her
dressing-gown with a candle.
She blinks a little in the light.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*in a low voice, as befits the solemn hour*]. Jack ! You still up ? I came to see whether you had remembered the light. I thought you went with Mr. Fylde ten minutes ago. It's nearly midnight.

[*JACK moistens his lips but is silent.*

[*Peering*] What's that ? Behind you. Laura ?

[*Another silence.*

I think you had better go to bed now, Laura.

[*LAURA goes through the door. MRS.*
ARROWSMITH is following.

JACK [*sharply*]. Now, mother, if you think——

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*in pain*]. Good-night, Jack.

You've given me a bad one.

[*She goes out. JACK looks at the door*
with an expressionless face.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The next morning. MR. and MRS. ARROWSMITH are together in the morning-room.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Don't you think it was silly to lock him in his room? He's not a child.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Well, last night Emily said—

MR. ARROWSMITH. And whatever did you go to her for?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. You were asleep. . . . Emily's had boys.

MR. ARROWSMITH. You're making too much fuss over the business. What did she say?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*a little bitter*]. Like you, she didn't think it so serious as I did. She was sleepy, and smiled and said that when they caught Wenty with Zana—that was the sewing-maid—they locked him in his bedroom, so as to make quite sure of getting the girl away before she could see him again.

MR. ARROWSMITH [*irritated*]. It isn't as if Jack and this girl were—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Were what?

MR. ARROWSMITH. Well, why did you think this girl would make such desperate attempts to see

the boy? You've taken the whole business too serious.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*anxious*]. But you approve of my having sent her away?

MR. ARROWSMITH. Oh yes. It was the proper thing to do. I suppose it was the correct thing. As long as the servants don't go spreading silly tales.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*relieved*]. Harry, Jack's a very quiet, steady sort of boy, and it's not as if he was a lout like Wenty Peterson. I saw him last night, trying to conceal Laura, ashamed when I found him out. With a boy like Jack, this sort of thing *is* serious.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Why are you always trying to make him out exceptional?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Well, you can't say he isn't. Have Emily and Mr. Fylde gone to church?

MR. ARROWSMITH. Yes. Why did you send for me?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*nervously*]. Because I think it is your part to speak to him. I've given orders he's to be here at—

MR. ARROWSMITH [*accustomed to leave everything disagreeable to his wife*]. I speak to him? Stuff! What is there to say?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. It's our duty to say something.

[*Suddenly enter FYLDE, looking rather serious.*

FYLDE. I beg your pardon if I'm intruding.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*resuming indifference*]. Why, I thought you were in church, Mr. Fylde.

FYLDE. I've left Mrs. Peterson there. I'm going to call for her and bring her back. Last evening you asked me for my advice about Jack. On the way to church I managed to get a hint out of your friend as to why Jack was not at breakfast this morning.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*coldly*]. I'm afraid the matter is rather a painful one.

FYLDE [*a little impatient*]. Oh, quite so. I apologise for intruding. But don't you see that it just gives you the opportunity of treating your son not as a child but a friend. If you patronise him now, you'll either lose your last chance, or he may even take the bit between his teeth and—
[*He hesitates.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*slowly*]. Since you seem to know so much about the matter, and since you at any rate take it seriously, although last night you assured me there was nothing of the sort in Jack's mind, I may as well tell you that of course no one's going to patronise him as you put it, but that I

have naturally had to send the girl away, and that his father has sent for him to give him a little quiet advice for his future conduct.

[MR. ARROWSMITH *looks uncomfortable*.

FYLDE [*looking harsh at her*]. You've dismissed the girl—already? Well, that's not my business. [Smiles.] *Ruat cælum!* I assure you that last night I meant what I said. You'll excuse me, I hope. [And he goes.

MR. ARROWSMITH [*irritation growing*]. The man's a crank. "Take the bit between his teeth! Treat him as a friend! *Ruat cælum!*" The man's a crank. And what did he say last night?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*simply*]. He's too clever for us. We only know that all young men are surrounded by dangers and temptations, and that it's our duty—

[*The door opens and JACK enters. He has assumed anger. He has been nerveling himself for the conflict all the night and half the day. Even while his flesh tingles under the kind, clumsy touch of his parents, his teeth are set. The situation is impossible to him; he is almost heroic.*

JACK. I want to know what exactly you mean by keeping me locked in my room for half the morning as if I was a dog or a boy of ten. Shan't I seem dignified to the servants? I want you to know—

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*knocking the affectation out of him by her sincerity*]. Jack, this isn't a time to be childish.

JACK [*flabbergasted, and gasping at the retort*]. Then why do you *treat* me as a child?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Father has sent for you because he feels that after what you have done, there are a few things he ought to say to you.

JACK [*bravely*]. And there are a good many things I want to say to you.

MR. ARROWSMITH. I think I'll just take a turn in the garden.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*with some heat*]. My dear, this is just as unpleasant for me; perhaps more so.

JACK. Why, you're both as frightened as I am!

MRS. ARROWSMITH. You have very little shame if you can talk like that. Since your father has so much difficulty in saying what is in his mind, I must say it for him. We have both of us hoped and believed you to be a steady lad, and though

we are willing to believe that what you did last night was only boyish folly, that no great harm was done, we are disappointed and unhappy about you. As I say, we had hoped and believed you to be a steady lad.

JACK. Well, now you see I'm a man. I'm sorry to hurt you, but——

MRS. ARROWSMITH. That is not what you should be sorry for. Although to us you will naturally always be our child; as you say, you are, in years at least, a man. And at your age you should be able to see that such things are wrong, or at least lead to wrong-doing.

JACK. I've done no harm. You understand nothing.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I think we understand well enough. You *have* done *grievous* harm, if not to yourself, yet to a servant in my house.

JACK [*with a bit of real firmness*]. I won't allow that to be said, anyhow.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I do not mean what perhaps you think I mean. I am willing to believe that you are only a boy. But in the case of a girl it is different. A girl never thinks of such a thing as a bit of fun. I do not think Laura is what one would call a wicked girl; but, for her own pro-

tection as much as for anything, of course I have had to send her away.

JACK [*rising excitedly*]. Where is she? That was why you locked me up. And of course you'll steal her letters. You mean we're not to meet, not to—

MR. ARROWSMITH. Jack!

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Be quiet, Harry. Of course I have sent her away.

JACK [*pacing to and fro*]. Good God!

MR. ARROWSMITH. Don't swear.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Do hold your tongue, dear. Yes, Jack, I have sent her away, and it seems I have done a good thing. I begin to think there has been more in your actions than I was charitable enough to imagine.

JACK. There was. There is. There's a great deal more. Mother, I—Laura has promised to be my wife.

MR. ARROWSMITH [*with an unpleasant loud laugh*]. Your wot?!!!

JACK [*frightened but firm*]. My wife.

MR. ARROWSMITH [*sarcastically*]. You young fool, you young fool.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Dear, please take a turn in the garden. I want to talk to Jack.

MR. ARROWSMITH. A turn in the garden! And he's talking—

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*taking him gently to the door*]. Please, dear.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Very well, very well; but when I come back, if he isn't in his sense—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. He will be.

[He goes out. MRS. ARROWSMITH in the presence of something really big becomes the mother fighting in the only way for what is very dear. She says gently—]

Now, Jack, come and tell me all about it.

JACK. It's no good, mother. I've made up my mind to find Laura and marry her.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Naturally, you are an honourable young man.

JACK. What?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Most young fellows would think no more about it and be only too glad to be rid of her. [*But she does not believe what she is pretending to believe.*]

JACK. What do you mean?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I assure you it is not so necessary to marry her as you think. Your father will give her a competency, and it is your first fault, and—

JACK. Mother, stop! It's not *that*. There's no harm done.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*pleadingly*]. Do you mean there is no *necessity* to provide for her?

JACK. No. No. Great Heavens, no. Oh, don't you see? I *want* to marry her. There's nothing else.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. So that's it. I was afraid that was it. You *want* to marry her. And have you thought of our feelings, your father's and mine?

JACK. I have. Oh, I have. But when a thing's necessary——

MRS. ARROWSMITH. You said just now it was not necessary.

JACK. No, not in that way; but oh I feel I must go my own way.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*calmly*]. So do all young men.

JACK. How can I make you understand? I mean I think it a duty to do what I think is right, not what other people think for me. You know what Meredith said: "No man ever did brave work who took counsel with his family first."

MRS. ARROWSMITH. So you think it right to quarrel with your family because you fancy you're in love with a pretty girl?

JACK. Oh, mother, you're talking very cheaply. You don't believe I'm a man. I don't know that I even think Laura pretty. It isn't just that we've fallen in love like that. We seem to answer to each other, to talk to each other. We aren't just looking for pleasure or comfort, but it seems right for us two to mate, and we're going to.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. And what will you do for money?

JACK. For money?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Your father won't give you a penny if you marry this girl. Do you want to break my heart and starve this girl?

JACK. But why, why can't you take it sensibly, as we do, as Edgar does? Why should it break your heart?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Well, well. If you are bent on it—

JACK [*fiercely*]. You speak as if it were a whim.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*placidly*]. No. If you are bent on it I will see what I can do with your father, but—

JACK. It's all because of her birth. What does that matter?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Of course if you don't mind—

JACK [*flabbergasted*]. I!!! What *is* there to say to you? For the sake of argument, father was the son of a poor man.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. She had *no* father.

JACK. What does that matter? Father raised himself. Why should I not raise her? [*But he has made the mistake now of entering on argument, and is losing his point of view.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Have you ever thought of it this way? Your father raised himself. Why should you degrade your children by marrying one who by the law of society cannot raise herself?

JACK. It won't do that, will it? No one will know about her birth.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Ah yes, they will. Nobody bothers so very much about the man. They take him for what he has made himself. But everybody asks about the girl's parentage, because as she was born so does she remain. And this girl——

JACK. Don't [*doubtfully*]. Yet I don't believe that's a bit true.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Nobody would call on her. Nobody would know her. She would be insulted and unhappy. I know all these things are petty and you have a soul above them, but your children would not have the life my grandchildren should

have. It is not mere prejudice. I am advising you for your good, not for my pleasure.

JACK. Yes, that's what you're doing. You're treating me as a child. I will not have it. I must go my own way. I must live my own life and profit by my own mistakes. Oh, don't look at me like that. I *can't* hurt you.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*covering her error*]. You are quite right to feel that your life is your own.

JACK. *You* say so? Yes, *you* say so.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Of course. And you mustn't think that I am in any way dictating to you.

JACK. Aren't you?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Of course not. I am only advising you as an old foolish mother. I'm not clever like you, and you mustn't think that I am setting myself up in any way as superior to you.

JACK. I suppose you are.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh no, I'm not, but I am older and I have more experience, and I have seen a little more of life.

JACK [*dubiously*]. Of course.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. And I have watched marriages like the one you contemplate, where both parties have been sincerely in love. And then, after a time, shorter or longer, the fatal effects of class-

difference and different bringing up have appeared, and the woman has always suffered more than the man. That is what you must think of. You will have your work but your wife will only have you.

JACK. I know what you mean, but they weren't really in love—they couldn't have been. Laura and I are really fitted for each other.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. They were in love. And they seemed suited to one another—every way; but the results were as I say.

JACK [*biting his nails*]. Is that so? Is that really so?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Yes. But even supposing your case would be an exception, would you be willing to bring those other troubles I spoke of, the social troubles, on the woman you love? You see, I am not thinking of you at all.

JACK. Laura wouldn't bother about the social troubles as you call them, but that about—about the woman suffering—it's as if I've only ideas but you've *knowledge*. You force me to see things in your colour.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I don't force you. I want you to think for yourself.

JACK. There seems something so solid and real about you. You *must* be right.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. It's a splendid thing for young men to be generous, and rash, but it's truer kindness to be self-controlled and thoughtful.

JACK. I've never heard you talk like this.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Have you ever asked me to? You never invite my confidence.

JACK. No. But your words sound all the more convincing just because you speak almost like a stranger. I must seem an awful baby to you. I will think about this by myself.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. No; decide at once before you have time to brood and get morbid. Mind, I am not telling or even asking you to give up Laura for good.

JACK. Aren't you?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. No, but don't see her for a bit. Go away and travel and see life. Then come back and make up your own mind. I will not force you. I would not think of forcing you.

JACK [*kissing her*]. Mother, how good you are!

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Will you do just this for me?

JACK. What?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. What I have suggested.

JACK [*firmly*]. I won't marry Laura. I don't think I will. I see with your eyes now that it will be better for Laura if I do not marry her. It will

be hard for both of us—at first. But I think you know best, and that in the end—

[FYLDE and MRS. PETERSON come in.

JACK breaks off and stares almost terrified at FYLDE. MRS. ARROWSMITH kisses him.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Dear boy! [To MRS. PETERSON.] Dear, will you come and take your things off? Mr. Fylde, we dine at one on Sundays, because of the servants. [She goes with MRS PETERSON.

JACK. Edgar, did you know that last night—

FYLDE. Yes, I heard.

JACK. I—I've promised not to marry Laura.

FYLDE [calmly]. Beaten at the first rebuff, as I prophesied.

JACK [exasperated]. No, but it wasn't the same as usual. My mother was quite different. She didn't treat me as a child.

FYLDE. Talked about the difference of class-temperament?

JACK. It wasn't so much what she said but the way she said it.

FYLDE. It all sounds very convincing of course, to the middle-class mind. But if you and Laura aren't prepared to take that little risk, then all I can do is to repeat the question I put yesterday and again

assure your mother that you really aren't in love. Anyhow, she's succeeded in imposing her views on you.

JACK [*in despair*]. And if I take *your* view and believe you, and say I'm going to take that little risk, you'll have imposed *your* views. I can't think I'm a man to take on now one atmosphere, now another. It's like a dream, the way I made that promise.

FYLDE [*kindly*]. You are impressionable. This is the test question. Your mother may be right and she may be wrong, but would anyone else—anyone who didn't matter to you—have convinced you by the same arguments?

JACK [*dejected*]. Of course not. I *know* all those arguments. They sounded different. She spoke with authority.

FYLDE. I've never seen anyone vary so tremendously as you. Compared with last night you're a child. You even *look* smaller.

JACK. They make me *feel* childish. So does this town, the people, everybody who remind me of when I *was* a child.

FYLDE. Do you know who it was got Laura sent away so quickly? It was Mrs. Peterson who advised that.

JACK [*rings bell*]. I can fight her. She's outside me. Let me stick to that idea, exaggerate it. Thanks, Edgar. Let me see only her in my mind and I shall win this fight. [*Enter JANET.*] Janet, tell the mistress I want to see her here at once before dinner; oh, and Mrs. Peterson too. Don't stare.

JANET. The mistress is just coming downstairs.

[*Exit JANET.*]

FYLDE. What are you going to do?

JACK. Have it out now.

FYLDE [*after a short pause*]. I don't think this rushing it will—

[*Enter MRS. ARROWSMITH with MRS.*

PETERSON, the latter placidly curious.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. You sent Janet to say *you wanted to see us?*

JACK. Do you mind? And—where is Laura?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Jack!

MRS. PETERSON. But surely I'm not wanted.

[*She turns to go.*]

JACK. Please sit down, Mrs. Peterson—Mother, where—is—Laura?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. But we've talked all about Laura. Jack, you're in a temper.

JACK. Y-es. Where's Laura?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Mr. Fylde, I must apologise for—

JACK. Where is she?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Jack, do please—

JACK. I am going to find out where she is before you or I leave this room.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh, this is terrible. Mr. Fylde, I left you here with Jack and—

[*The gong rings.*

[*She says with a sigh of relief.*] Ah! There's the dinner.

[*She makes for the door. JACK plants himself before it.*

JACK. Dinner can wait. I can't.

[*MRS. ARROWSMITH tries to force her way, JACK seizes her carelessly by the wrists and places her in a chair, then stands again against the door.*

Come, come, Mother. You are showing me very plainly that all your talk about not forcing me was humbug. Will you believe that at last there has come a time when you can neither bully me nor fool me. Tell me where Laura is and you shall have your dinner.

[*There is a sound at the door.*

VOICE OF MR. ARROWSMITH. What's all this?
Aren't you coming to dinner? Winnie! Let
me in!

[JACK opens the door suddenly, MR.
ARROWSMITH falls in on all fours.

JACK. In!

MR. ARROWSMITH. What the devil!

JACK. Don't swear.

MR. ARROWSMITH [*turns round and looks at JACK*].
What's this?

[*He rises slowly, gulps, and looks at
MRS. ARROWSMITH, who shakes her
head.*

JACK. Don't you come near me. [*He raises his
fists.*]

MRS. PETERSON [*amused*]. You raise your hands
to your mother and threaten your father!

JACK. Yes, Mrs. Peterson, I like to hear your
voice. [*To MR. ARROWSMITH.*] I am treating my
mother for the first time in my life as a woman,
I am going to treat you as a man. If I have any
nonsense I shall hit you.

MR. ARROWSMITH. What! Did you say he raised
his hands to his mother?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh, my dear, he only helped

me to a chair. Mr. Fylde, this must be very painful to you, a stranger. I am afraid my son is ill. We had better go.

[JACK locks the door and puts the key in his pocket.]

FYLDE. I see there is a lock to this door.

MR. ARROWSMITH. A lock? Of course there's a lock. He's locked the door. [Moves towards it.]

JACK. Father, I am afraid you don't understand. I shall have to repeat myself. Where is Laura?

MR. ARROWSMITH [sarcastic]. You young fool. So that's it. Laura? Laura? Where you'll be if we have much more.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [in despair]. Don't, dear. [To JACK.] I will tell you where Laura is after dinner.

JACK. You will tell me now.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Give me that key. Do you know the gong's gone? Why, the claret will be boiling.

JACK [firm, but feeling the strain]. I have only one thing to say and I shan't say it much oftener.

here is——

MR. ARROWSMITH. Laura. Damn Laura!

MRS. ARROWSMITH. My dear, you mustn't.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Well, is the hussy to spoil my lamb, a girl from the gutter, a bastard? What

did you want to bring her into the house for? Now, *you*—give me that key.

JACK [*dogged*]. I won't.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Then I'll get it. Fylde, hold him.

MRS. PETERSON [*interrupting*]. But this is all so childish. I might be in my own house.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. It's disgraceful.

[*The gong rings again.*
And the servants will guess. I oughtn't to have sent her away.

MR. ARROWSMITH. The boy'll see soon how ridiculous he's making himself.

JACK [*helplessly, and passing his hand over his brow*]. But I'm making you ridiculous too. That's something. I am doing that. Oh, but it's going.

FYLDE [*apparently flippant*]. You're losing tone. You must end this thing on a high level. Virtuoso passages should end effectively. Get out into the air.

JACK [*grateful*]. You're right. Mother, you've not beaten me. I give you till six o'clock. You'll tell me then or I shall leave you. [To MR. ARROWSMITH.] Take your key. [*Throws it on a table after unlocking the door.*]

MR. ARROWSMITH. And how do you propose to earn your living?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. But you can't go out like this, without any dinner.

[*Fylde cannot resist a chuckle at this little touch.*

MRS. PETERSON. On three of the five occasions on which Wenty ran away I induced him to wait till I'd filled my botany case with sandwiches for him.

JACK. Laugh away! Cackle away, all of you. Ha, ha, ha! Remember, Mother—six. And now I've five hours out of this damned Sabbatarian sink of mediocre hypocrisy, somewhere where it's clean.

[*He goes, Edgar murmuring sadly "Temper." There is an awkward silence, then Mrs. Arrowsmith is heroic.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*ordinarily*]. Shall we go in to dinner? Harry, will you take Mrs. Peterson? Mr. Fylde, your arm.

[*They go out statelily to dinner, as the gong sounds for the third time.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE:—*Late afternoon in the garden. Tea has been cleared away. Four deck chairs are placed in a wide semicircle on the lawn, facing the audience. FYLDE is on the right smoking a cigar. MRS. PETERSON is on the left, reading. MR. and MRS. ARROWSMITH in the middle, both dozing. MRS. ARROWSMITH's book slips off her lap and she wakes with a start.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*reproachfully*]. My dear, how can you sleep?

MR. ARROWSMITH [*waking up and staring round stupidly*]. Eh? Has he come yet?

FYLDE [*glaring into space*]. Has she come yet?

MR. ARROWSMITH. Now, Winnie, I won't have her inside the gates.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*sighing*]. I hope she is already inside, my dear. It's getting on for six.

MR. ARROWSMITH. You've sent for her? Turn her out. She mustn't come.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Harry, be calm, be calm.

MR. ARROWSMITH. I am, my dear, I am. But [*breaking out again*] why did you send for her? Are you going to give in the first time the young fool—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. My dear, do control yourself.

MR. ARROWSMITH. I . . . what!

MRS. ARROWSMITH. You are excited. Try and look at the matter reasonably. I am not going to give in to Jack.

MR. ARROWSMITH. I should hope not. [*He growls.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I am going to make my appeal to the young person herself. If she is sensible, as I hope she will be, she will give up Jack herself and promise never to see him or write to him.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Of course she won't do anything of the sort.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I hope she will. But if not, I can't have Jack careering round the country like this.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Then you are going to give in to him.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I hope I'm not. But the only way I can exert my influence over him is by keeping him with me, and the only way I can keep him with me is by temporising. Unless, as I hope, the girl consents to give him up, when I think even Jack will hardly—

MRS. PETERSON. Surely it's foolish to bring the two together again, that is if it really *is* serious.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Of course. It's all bunkum. As if the lad would really run away!

FYLDE. You don't know Jack.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Eh?

FYLDE. You don't know Jack the man. You only know Jack the boy.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Bosh! We shall be having Jack the giant-killer next.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. My dear.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Excuse me, Fylde, but really—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. It may not be necessary for them to see each other. I must see the girl at once.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Is she here?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I tell you, dear, I hope so. I wanted to manage that she should come a little before Jack, so that—

FYLDE. Shall I go and see?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Would you mind?

[*He goes into the house.*

MR. ARROWSMITH. I believe you're deliberately arranging to bring them together again. I'll go. If there's one thing I dread—

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*impatiently*]. It's a scene. Yes,

yes, I know. But there will be no scene. The girl is—

MRS. PETERSON [*interrogatory*]. In love?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Non-sense. She is only—well, well, I hope she will be sensible.

MR. ARROWSMITH [*decidedly*]. You'll find me on the lower lawn.

[*Takes up his chair and goes through hedge. Then MRS. PETERSON takes up her chair.*

MRS. PETERSON. And I think perhaps you don't want me either.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh, I'm driving you all away.

MRS. PETERSON. I'll join your husband.

[*She goes. Pause. Then enter LAURA, neatly dressed. By no means a meek weakling, she is not disposed to lie down under the insult of having been first sent off to a neighbouring farmhouse and kept in durance till the Sunday evening train should depart, then dragged back to the scene of her ignominy.*

LAURA. You sent for me, Mrs. Arrowsmith. I don't know whether you realise that from the moment I left your house I was a free woman. I

came because there is something I want to say to Jack.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Laura, I felt it my duty to speak to you very sharply this morning.

LAURA. And you gave me no chance to speak at all. So I've come now.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I think you forget your position.

LAURA. I think you do.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*controlling herself*]. Yes. It was good of you to come. And now sit down, will you, and let us have a little chat. [LAURA *sits*.] Now, Laura, I am a mother, and I'm going to speak very plainly. My husband will never give Jack another penny if he marries you, and I have nothing. He will say Jack's disgraced himself. I don't say it's reasonable, but—will you give him up?

LAURA. I put you another question. Are you certain it would not be a good thing if Mr. Arrowsmith did not give Jack another penny? Would you rather your son was comfortable or strong?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I don't understand you. I want him to be happy.

LAURA. And you don't think he'd be happy with me.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*helpless*]. My dear!

LAURA. Well, Jack is a modern boy, and I'm a modern girl. Do you know anybody else who would make him happier than I should?

MRS. ARROWSMITH. But I hardly know you at all. And aren't we wandering from the point?

LAURA. I'm merely showing you that you have no right whatever to interfere. Of course you don't know me because I've been your servant and you've never looked at me as a human being, and it's the same with your son. You don't know him because you've never looked at him as an equal. Oh, there's Mr. Arrowsmith.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh dear, and he just went. Why couldn't he keep away? It's not like him.

[Enter MR. ARROWSMITH with his chair.

MR. ARROWSMITH. I thought I'd better come and see this—young lady. Mrs. Peterson suggested that I—I have something to say. [He sits in his chair, facing the audience, and is very sheepish.]

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Yes, dear? [Kindly to both parties.] Laura seems very ready to be amenable.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Yes, yes. Er—Miss—

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Nichols.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Miss Nichols, I—my son is a very young man, and I'm afraid he hasn't behaved too well. Now I've been a young man myself, and I

know young men. They sometimes let themselves go. Now—er—will you take £50 and let him off?

LAURA [*has quivered, then controls herself*]. First I should like to hear what Jack himself would say to such a proposal. Where is he?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*uneasily*]. Er—he's gone for a walk, I believe.

LAURA. Well now, Mr. Arrowsmith, for your answer. I don't understand a man who could make such a proposal to a human being, and perhaps you don't understand a girl who could refuse it. That may be because we belong to different generations. I don't know. When you were young, as you say, there may have often been young men played with girls and then were glad to get off for £50. That may be life for all I know, but it isn't Jack and it isn't me. I don't know much about life, I'm going to find out about it, but I expect human beings are a bit more sacred now than they used to be. No one could influence the relation between Jack and me but ourselves, but if anything outside could, it would be the idea of having a man like you for a father-in-law.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Oh, my dear, you mustn't.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Why not? Let 'er. Doesn't

she know it's her last chance? She's lost her catch and she'll be turned out of the gates in a minute.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Harry, Harry!

[*A clock strikes.*]

Oh, there's six. I wonder whether—

LAURA. I apologise to you, Mrs. Arrowsmith; I shouldn't have said it, and it was useless. Neither of you will ever understand what reverence of life means. *You* appealed to me on the ground that your son would lose money, and *he* appeals to me by offering money. You reverence wealth and a worldly career. It's all so meaningless to me.

MR. ARROWSMITH. If wealth means nothing to you, Miss—Miss Nichols—I'm glad to hear it. Meanwhile, you aren't going to marry my son.

LAURA. Why not? My birth, I suppose. What was yours?

MR. ARROWSMITH. Impudent.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*half rising*]. There's Jack . . . and Mr. Fylde.

[*The two come out of the house. JACK is white, tired, collapsed, sheepish.*]

JACK [*nervously*]. Oh there you are, Laura. [A little defiantly.] So they did send for you. [He moves to her, to kiss. She motions him back.]

LAURA. No.

JACK. Why? What? [*He sinks into a chair, exhausted.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*anxiously*]. Have you had anything to eat?

JACK. I've been walking all the time. Edgar, fetch me some brandy—dining-room sideboard.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*leaning over JACK*]. And you'll find some cake. Or, ring the bell when you get in. Laura . . .

JACK [*smiling*]. No, mother. Laura's not your servant any longer. Cake'll do, Edgar. Ask for a whole one. [*Exit FYLDE.*]

LAURA [*to MRS. ARROWSMITH*]. May I speak alone to Jack?

MR. ARROWSMITH. Now, that's just the very thing not to. No, Winnie.

LAURA [*steadily, to MRS. ARROWSMITH*]. I think if you're wise, you'll let me.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*looks incredulous, and a bit suspicious, then says earnestly and kindly*]. I believe you're a good girl. Dear, shall we join Emily for a quarter of an hour?

MR. ARROWSMITH. But this is all stuff and— [*He feels things are getting beyond him.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH. I think it will be all right, dear.

[*Exeunt with chairs. MR. ARROWSMITH against his better judgment.*
Pause. JACK holds out his arms and LAURA falls into them. She disengages herself, sobbing. She dries her eyes.

LAURA. Mr. Fylde will be back in a minute.

JACK. Laura, your manner isn't a bit the same. You were almost hard when I came. Laura, I'm still ghastly frightened of them. They haven't fallen off me. You should have seen me defying them. It makes me shiver to think of it. Edgar said it was a bit of virtuoso work. That's all it was.

LAURA. And I shall never be the same bright girl again, never.

JACK. Why, when we're married you'll laugh and be jolly and smoke cigarettes just the same.

LAURA. Is that really how you feel towards me, as if I was just a jolly, laughing girl?

JACK. No dear, my beloved. I feel so much more . . . sometimes. You're my mate, Laura, my pal. Only . . .

LAURA. Only?

JACK. Only, so often I don't feel that. I want to be boy and girl just playing and laughing together,

and away from all these horrid things and people.
And now I'm so tired.

LAURA [*looking at him*]. It would be almost cruel to make you marry.

JACK [*sitting up*]. What do you mean by that?

LAURA. Here's Mr. Fylde.

[Enter FYLDE with food and drink.]

Thank you, Mr. Fylde. Will you—will you come back quite soon? In five or ten minutes? I shall want you.

FYLDE [*surprised*]. Yes, certainly. [He goes.]

JACK [*eating and drinking*]. Laura.

LAURA. Yes?

JACK. What is it?

[*The bells for evening service begin to ring. LAURA goes behind him and bends over him, stroking his head like a mother, as he eats.*]

LAURA. My little boy. So you're still frightened?
The shock hasn't set you free?

JACK. No. I don't think things ever work in big jumps like that.

LAURA [*softly*]. Perfect love casteth out fear.

JACK [*after a second, grasps it*]. Oh, but that fear's only because with my parents I'm still a child. You know all about that.

LAURA. Yes, you've so often said that to me. And I've liked it, and I've thought myself a child too. And I've never much minded your shyness before. It was only last night when the big chance came and I saw you frightened before your mother that I realised I'm ten years older than you.

JACK. But this morning I—

LAURA. Virtuoso work, you said. I know, Jack, you were heroic, heroic like a child who faces ghosts. And a child's love is very beautiful and pure, but it isn't the love a woman must have, at least not my sort of woman. It isn't perfect. It isn't your fault your love isn't perfect, but if it *was* perfect, you wouldn't fear. I can't explain it any better, but I can't marry you. [Silence.] I'm afraid you must face it, old boy.

JACK. But when I get away from them, and live with you, I shan't be a child. I shall be free then.

LAURA. I feel ten years older than you. How do you know I shouldn't be a second mother to you? I should even love you just the same as a mother. I don't want a slave. I love you, Jack, but not as a lover. I couldn't risk it. Last night I knew I wanted a man. I was awake all night, but I found out for certain.

JACK. Won't we meet sometimes and write?

LAURA [*covering her face*]. No, no. It must be all over. I couldn't stand the other.

JACK. Then you do love me?

LAURA. Of course, but I couldn't live with you. You wouldn't satisfy me. I believe you'd never have turned to me at all but you were miserable. It was a sort of defiance, Jack. You said so last night.

JACK. That may be true, but don't you see it doesn't matter what made me come to you, so long as I did come.

LAURA. You didn't come. You must see it. You must see the difference. You will some day. You aren't a man.

JACK. Then wait. Give me a chance to grow. I've lived a year since last night. Let me live another ten.

LAURA. Oh I don't know. [*Vehemently.*] No. A man like you never grows, not unless he's absolutely free and unconscious. You've so often told me you can never be yourself with people who've known you as a child. You've been to me as a child. If you grow and become a man and meet me then, you'll become as a child again with me. But you won't meet me. You'll marry some girl, of course you must, and be happy.

JACK. And you?

LAURA. I shall meet my mate too, don't you be frightened for me.

JACK. Laura, do you swear this isn't pity for me, or anyone else—my mother?

LAURA. Oh, what an insult! No, my dear boy, I'm nearly heart-broken to leave you, and I should love it if you could come as a man sometime in the future and marry me as a man; but it's no good being idiotic. Sit at my knee now and let's wait for Mr. Fylde.

[She sits, and he puts his head in her lap.]

LAURA *[gently]*. How your mother loves you!

JACK. You're a mother too!

LAURA. You will be kind to her.

JACK. I begin to see it. Oh my God! how the world is tortured, and it's all by love. Laura, you never had a mother, you had a friend. You can never know it, yet you're teaching it me now.

LAURA *[stroking his head]*. Tell me about it.

JACK. It's pain. All this fear of mine . . . it's the agony of loving. I'm too close to her. Look at the flowers there. Laura, I can never tell her. You've heard of the love of God, or the fear of God, the terrible impersonal sacred thing. The

love of parents is that, the love of the Creator. A little woman—I can't treat her as a little woman. I think the fates are unkind. Why is there this law? Why were we given minds? Why are we handicapped by this thing that's deeper than our minds? I might never have liked my mother if I had been free. I have to worship her, I adore her, I'm drawn into her as if she were the whole of Nature. Your lap teaches it me in the sun. Oh this beautiful *curse* of the Madonna!

LAURA. I'm glad.

JACK. I think the fates are unfair to me. My father—if he had been a clever man, a doctor, a soldier, a man I could respect! But he's a small, fat, tubby knife-maker, coarse, unkind—and he is a god to me. Love or fear or hate—they're all the same.

LAURA. In the sun it is love. When a thing is beautiful, surrender to it strengthens. When you realise how wonderful this great thing is, when you accept it wholly, I think you will be free.

JACK. I feel older now.

LAURA. I think at this moment you are the perfect child.

JACK. And isn't it perhaps just my nature to be thorough? Perhaps Nature demanded I should

become the perfect child, before I could begin to grow into a man. When all this fear has forever been changed to love——

LAURA. Ah, but that word “forever.” You are only perfect now for one little moment.

[Enter FYLDE.]

LAURA [to FYLDE]. I believe you’re going to town to-night. They were keeping me in Brown’s farmhouse till the train went. My things are at the station. Will you watch over me till I get to London?

JACK. No, Laura, I’ll come——

LAURA. There’s a bit of the man. [They both rise.] Jealousy!

JACK. That has the right touch, has it? Let me come. Let’s be married to-morrow, Laura. I love you. [Kisses her skirt.]

LAURA. Poor boy! My poor boy! No, dear, but I’ll tell you what you can do. Your father offered me £50 to let you off. I’ll take it from you. Give me that for a course of training in one of these colleges and I’ll be a typist or something. Send it to Mr. Fylde. [To FYLDE.] Take me away, please, and don’t ask me to explain.

FYLDE. The train doesn’t go till 8.30, and you’ll want dinner. We’ll have it at the Station Hotel.

I'm packed. I must say good-bye. By the way, where are you sleeping to-night?

JACK. There isn't any need to go to-night, like this.

LAURA. Mother and I used to hang out in a boarding-house in Euston Square. It's always open.

JACK. This is damnable. It's too quick, like this.

FYLDE. Where are your people?

JACK. Down there. [*He points.*]

[JACK and LAURA are alone.]

JACK. "Surrender to a beautiful thing strengthens." Take my love and I shan't be a weakling, in my slavery to it.

LAURA. You juggle with my words. Your love may be beautiful. Give it to your mother. Oh I'm not logical. Or else you aren't.

JACK [*desperately*]. I admit I've been frightened —of coming to grips with you, I mean, but —

LAURA. I shan't acknowledge that money. Mr. Fylde will. You mustn't know my address. In six months you will be happy. So shall I. I swear that if I wanted you I should take you. I want to get away from you and forget. I want something straight and strong, and a bit brutal.

JACK. Don't see too much of Fylde.

LAURA [*laughs*]. In time you'll be a fit lover for any woman.

JACK. Twenty-four hours ago I was breaking my mother's tea-things out of pique.

LAURA. Don't imagine you've grown up yet.

JACK. You're helping me to.

LAURA [*looks thoughtfully and a little wistfully at him*]. Oh yes, of course.

[*Re-enter FYLDE.*

FYLDE. You won't want to meet them. They're coming. Good-bye, Jack. Come up any time to Chelsea.

LAURA [*quickly*]. Don't be sentimental. You have to treat life a bit hardly nowadays, or it makes you mad. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt LAURA and FYLDE. JACK sits*

down and takes out a pipe.

Enter MR. and MRS. ARROWSMITH and MRS. PETERSON with chairs.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*a little eagerly*]. So she's gone. You've let her go?

JACK. Yes, mother, she's gone.

[*He kisses her forehead. Perhaps he would like to sink into tears in her arms, but he feels she is too small, too remote.*

MR. ARROWSMITH. That's all right. I won't ask—

JACK. By the way, father, she's accepted that offer of yours. Do you mind making the cheque out to me? And I'm taking a month's holiday from to-morrow.

MR. ARROWSMITH [*a little surprised*]. Oh—er—yes. Where are y' going?

JACK. Paris, I think, to start with. I don't know. It isn't the season. Do you think you can spare me a hundred?

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*coming to him*]. It's very good of you to give her up. Your father and I appreciate it very much.

JACK [*looking through her at his trouble*]. There, there, mother. [*He pushes her gently away.*]

MRS. PETERSON [*pleasantly*]. When you're tired of Paris will you spare a week with us to recover? There's the motor-bicycle, unless it's smashed again, and Wenty'll be at home.

JACK [*smiling faintly*]. Thanks so much. I shall like it. But I expect mother'll forbid the motor-bicycle. Will you excuse me now?

[*He goes. The three sit down, facing the audience. Then MRS. PETERSON gets up.*

MRS. PETERSON. No. I think I'll go in too. I have a letter to write.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*having adjusted her spectacles, takes up a magazine*]. The post doesn't go till midnight, Emily.

MRS. PETERSON. I know, dear, but I want to get it done before supper. What a beautiful sunset. [*She points.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Yes. Isn't it?

[MRS. PETERSON goes. Silence. *The bells stop ringing.*]

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*lowering her magazine, to MR. ARROWSMITH who has lit a cigar*]. Dear, I'm so thankful. It's been a terrible day. You mustn't chaff him. Poor lad, he feels it deeply.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Yes, we're well out of it.

[*Silence. MRS. ARROWSMITH slowly raises the magazine and reads.*]

MR. ARROWSMITH *smokes on.*

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Dear, we're getting a little old, I'm afraid. I don't much like him going off alone to Paris.

MR. ARROWSMITH. Stuff and nonsense.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*after considering the application of this remark carefully*]. He treated us both like

children—just now I mean. It wasn't what he said. It was the way he said it.

MR. ARROWSMITH. He did you; not me.

MRS. ARROWSMITH. Well, you're older than me, Harry, seven years older.

[*Pause.*]

MR. ARROWSMITH. Six and a half, my dear.

MRS. ARROWSMITH [*sighing*]. Yes. He's growing up at last, I suppose.

[*Silence.*]

MR. ARROWSMITH. I'm glad he's had the experience. Do him good. [*Pause.*] Wake him up.

[*Silence.* *The cigar sinks*; MR. ARROWSMITH's head sinks; *ash falls on to his waistcoat*; *the cigar slips on to the grass*. MR. ARROWSMITH is asleep. MRS. ARROWSMITH gazes at a rhododendron bush in deep, tender thought.

CURTAIN

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